

## APPENDIX E

### LEWISTOWN FIELD OFFICE FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

**Background:** The Lewistown Field Office manages 1.4 million acres of public lands (surface acres) in 16 counties located in central Montana. The Lewistown Field Office has field stations located in Great Falls and Havre, Montana. Sixty-four thousand acres within the area are designated as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), with the largest areas being the Cow Creek and Ervin Ridge WSAs. Thirty-six thousand acres are designated as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), with the largest areas being the Cow Creek, Sweetgrass Hills, and Judith Mountains ACEC. Important Recreation Management areas include Kipp Park, Coal Banks Landing, Judith Landing, and the Richard Wood Watchable Wildlife Area. Another special area is the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River which flows through 149 miles of the Lewistown Field Office.

The Lewistown Fire Program has fire protection responsibility on both the Lewistown and Malta Field Office public lands, 3.5 million acres, and on approximately 200,000 acres of Forest Service lands. Since 1988, the Lewistown Fire Program has responded to an average of 42 fires a year burning an average 4,200 acres per year within the fire protection area. The Lewistown fire management program also provides assistance to other agencies within the Field Office area, including Charles M. Russell Refuge (FWS), the USDA Forest Service, the USDI Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Department of Natural Resources-Montana. (See Map 6.)

**Planning Guidance:** The West Hi-Line Resource Management Plan (January, 1992), the Lewistown Field Office segment of the Judith Resource Management Plan (September, 1994), and the Great Falls Field Office segment of the Headwaters Resource Management Plan (July, 1984) will be updated as appropriate to incorporate the fire management plan objectives and guidance from this analysis.

**Wildland fire suppression and rehabilitation guidance common to all areas within the Lewistown Field Office** In addition to the state guidelines found in Appendix A, the following resources or values will be given further consideration as specified. Minimize the use of heavy equipment and avoid use of bulldozers in or near stream beds.

**Cultural Resources:** In areas sensitive for their cultural resource values conditional fire line tactics would emphasize the use of natural barriers and hand constructed fire lines.

**Minerals Management:** Mineral development and production facilities on public lands (federal surface) should be protected from all wildland fires.

**Prescribed fire and other fuels management guidance common to all areas within the Lewistown Field Office boundaries** In addition to the state guidelines found in Appendix A, the following resources or values will be given further consideration as specified.

**Air Quality:** No prescribed burning will be done if deterioration of Class I airshed values (especially Fort Peck Indian Reservation, and U.L. Bend National Wildlife Refuge) would result.

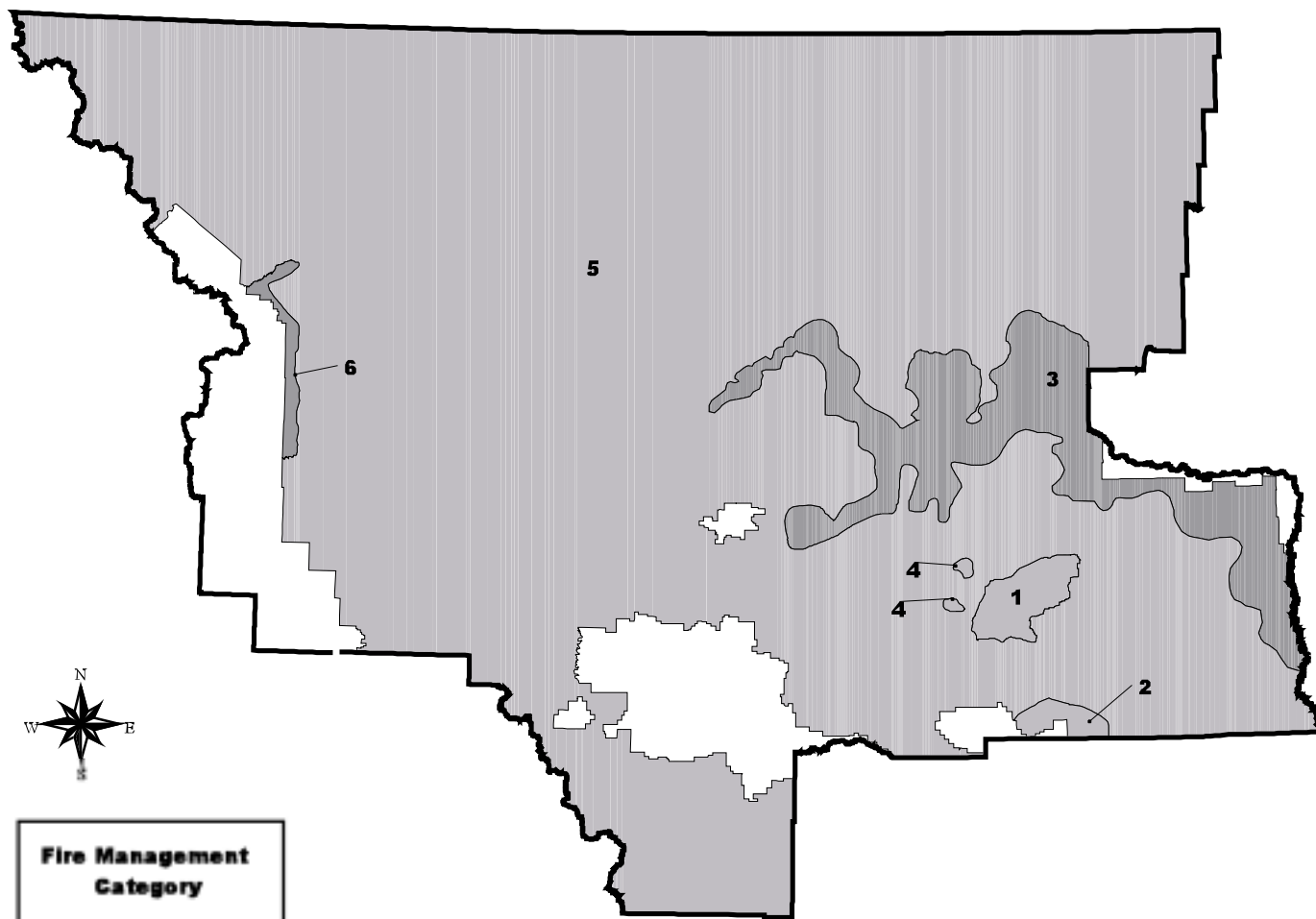
**Ecosystem Management:** Identify areas not meeting Standards of Health or where Land Use Plan objectives are not being met. Where appropriate, develop prescription burns which will meet Standards of Health, and Land Use plan objectives. Where fire fuel loading is an issue prescription burns or other fuel reduction strategies (grazing, mechanical harvesting/clearing, thinning, etc.) will be developed as needed to effectively reduce risks and restore Health.

**Hazardous Fuels Reduction Plans:** The hazardous fuel reduction plans will be developed using a risk, hazard assessment. Identified hazard reduction projects will be included as part of the watershed assessment planning process or stand alone plans will be developed for at risk communities

**Minerals Management:** Develop hazardous wildland fuels reduction plans to reduce the risk of wildland fire near mineral development, production, and storage facilities on or adjacent to public lands with hazardous fuels buildup. Care will be exercised to insure fire is excluded from coal bearing strata that is exposed to the surface. Fire treatment in areas that are developed for minerals oil/gas, will be coordinated with the developing companies.

**Wildlife Habitat:** Horizontal juniper and the non-sprouting sagebrush species have been identified as unique and valuable wildlife habitat for many different wildlife species though out the Lewistown Field Office area. These species only reproduce from available seeds. To accommodate the rejuvenation of these plants a mosaic of age classes in the community is desirable to make seeds available to burned areas and promote structural diversity. Every attempt will be made to avoid total treatment of these habitat types and to maintain a sufficient amount of older

## MAP 6 LEWISTOWN FIELD OFFICE

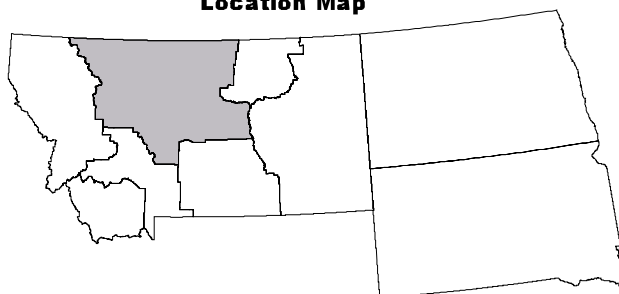


### Fire Management Category



- 1 Judith
- 2 Little Snowy Mountains
- 3 Missouri Breaks
- 4 North and South Moccasins
- 5 Prairie Grass, Brush and Agricultural Lands
- 6 Rocky Mountain Front

### Location Map



plants in the community. Prescribed burn projects in these habitat types will have a wildlife biologist available as a resource advisor and wildfire suppression personnel fighting fire in juniper and sagebrush communities will make every effort to keep the area biologist informed of the current situation.

## **PRAIRIE GRASS/BRUSH AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS (B5)**

**Area Description:** The area in the west portion is predominately private land with small grain production. It contains only small tracts of isolated public land in the with the exception of a few blocks on the Marias or Teton Rivers. The topography is rolling plains with fair to good quality soils. Vegetation on private land consists primarily of grain and hay crops with some lands in the Conservation Reserve Program. Native range on private and public land is mixed grasses with minor components of sage and other brush species. Water sources include reservoirs, ponds, and a few small springs. The primary economic activity of the area is farming and cattle.

The Sweet Grass Hills ACEC contains 7640 acres of BLM administered land on the upper elevations of three buttes in Toole and Liberty Counties. This ACEC is important as a religious and cultural use area for Native Americans, as high value habitat for reintroduction of endangered peregrine falcons and as seasonally important elk and deer habitat.

A block of approximately 18,000 acres of public land at Lonesome Lake is Bureau of Reclamation land which BLM has the responsibility to oversee. The area is a relatively flat area in Northern Chouteau county with gently sloping coulees and a large ephemeral lake. The area has been nominated for an ACEC because it is partly an island of native grasslands in a vast area of farmland. 2120 acres of the public land is leased for farming and generally in small grain production. Soils are mostly silty types and reasonably productive. Most of the vegetation in the area is annual grain crops. Perennial vegetation is Conservation Reserve Program, minor amounts of hay production, crested wheatgrass and prairies dominated by short grass species. Some swales and pseudo riparian and wetlands are mid grass and herbaceous wetland communities. The area provides habitat for waterfowl, upland, and song birds, deer, and pronghorns. Water sources in the area are small reservoirs, pits, wells and pipelines. The primary economic activity in the area is dryland small grain production and cattle production. All the public lands are either leased for farming or permitted for livestock grazing in between the May to November period.

The North Central part of this area includes three blocks of public land surrounded by private farm land. Fresno is an area of dissected coulees along the reservoir on Milk River. Chain of Lakes Coulee is a wetland area accessory to the Fresno area. Wildhorse Lake is a high basin of sandy soils near the Canadian border which is a dry lake bed for most of the year. Native vegetation in these areas is mixed prairie grasslands. Coulees and draws have minor woody communities. Improvements at Chain of Lakes Coulee have resulted in mature marshes and riparian areas dominated by herbaceous species. Area wildlife species include deer, upland birds and waterfowl. The primary economic activity in the area is dryland grain farming with some minor livestock operations. Fresno has developed summer recreation facilities including; picnic and camp sites, and summer cabins.

North Blaine county is the northeast extent of this polygon. This portion of the polygon has a fair amount of public land dispersed through the area as a result of Bankhead Jones Act lands reconveyed in the 1930s. The area is glaciated plains with native vegetation being mostly mixed and short grass species. The better soils in this area are mostly private land and are predominately in dryland grain production, however along Milk River and in a few outlying areas irrigation systems have been installed and a variety of annual and perennial crops are grown. Conservation Reserve Program enrollment of private land is common in this area. Much of the native plains that was plowed and now reseeded to perennial plants is in crest wheatgrass or other species. Coulees will have a good diversity of sage and other brush species. Wildlife in the area is pronghorn, deer, waterfowl, and upland birds. Sage grouse, Swift fox, mountain plover, prairie dogs, assorted raptors are established in the area. Primary economic activities are farming/ranching, natural gas and some oil field development.

Comprising 4,600 acres of BLM administered land in Toole County, the Kevin Rim ACEC has a high potential as a peregrine falcon reintroduction area and is currently habitat for a variety of raptors. It is also important for its high density of cultural resources.

The upland area of Lonetree and Ragland Benches is in South Blaine county. There are minor amounts of public land on the top of the bench but the area is bordered on three sides by regions of continuous public land. The soils are silty and clay texture soil on rolling upland plateau with in the Missouri Breaks. The vegetation on the private lands in this area is regularly annual grain crops with some hay and Conservation Reserve Program acres. The native range on private and public land in this area is sage brush grass lands verging into some Missouri Breaks juniper and conifer on break slopes. The major wildlife species in this area are

Mule deer, Bighorn Sheep, transitory elk, sage grouse and sharptail grouse. Water resources in this area are constructed reservoirs, ponds and a few small springs. The primary economic activity in this area is farming and cattle grazing. The plant community will be mostly private land grain fields in this area. The primary economic activity in the area is dryland small grain production and cattle production. All public lands are either leased for farming or permitted for livestock grazing. Permitted grazing on public lands occurs between May and November.

The majority of the area in the South East part of the polygon is private land with crops or small tracts of commercial timber consisting of ponderosa pine. Most of the BLM land was farmed in the past (LU land) and is currently mostly crested wheatgrass, mixed native grasses, and some scattered sagebrush. The riparian vegetation along drainages provide year-long habitat for antelope and deer. Numerous power lines, highways, and small towns are found in the area. The North Central area includes three blocks of public land in North Hill County that are surrounded by private land with livestock production. Fresno is a developed summer recreation reservoir.

Another area for special consideration would be the Acid Shale Pine Forest ACEC located in eastern Fergus and western Petroleum Counties. This area is important because of its small stands of timber and its diverse wildlife populations.

**Wildland Fire History:** From 1980 to 1999 Federal agencies have responded to 40 fires on BLM Grass and Range lands which burned an estimated 2,605 acres. Average fire size was 65 acres.

**Interface/intermix:** Communities and isolated ranches are located throughout the Grass and Range Lands adjacent to public lands. Typically these areas are surrounded by scattered grass and sage brush vegetation or crop lands. Communities include Big Sandy, Flatwillow, Havre, Roy, Winifred, Winnett, Chinook, Harlem, Turner, Hogeland, Kevin, Sunburst and Loma.

**Area Concerns and Constraints:** Special concerns and constraints include scattered land pattern of public, state, and private land; ACEC with cultural, paleontological, and vegetative values that might be affected by fire fighting equipment; and the use of earth moving/tillage equipment in the Wilderness Study Areas and ACEC. Wildlife habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, songbirds, deer, and, antelope.

**Resource Objectives:** Manage native vegetation to meet standards for rangeland health and to create islands of habitat for birds and wildlife. Maintain stable soils and sustain current land uses. Sagebrush habitats, especially

those in identified sage grouse nesting and wintering areas and big game concentration areas should be maintained. Scattered stands of Ponderosa Pine, especially those exhibiting old growth characteristics, shall be maintained.

**Fire Management Objectives:** Wildland fire is generally not desired due to large amount of private and state land and agricultural production throughout the area. Fire, in some cases can be desirable throughout this zone. Obvious concerns focus around structural developments, crop lands, livestock and livestock forage needs. Management of unplanned fire occurrence would be based on values at risk, current and predicted weather and current land management direction. Prescribed fire could be used based on management direction and agreements with adjacent landowners.

#### **Wildland Fire Suppression and Rehabilitation:**

**Cultural Resources:** Sensitive areas for cultural resources include the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC, Kevin Rim ACEC and Lonesome Lake. The Kevin Rim ACEC and Lonesome Lake areas contain high densities of prehistoric sites. The Sweet Grass Hills ACEC is a traditional cultural property important to the Blackfeet and Chippewa-Cree tribes. To protect cultural resources in sensitive areas during wildland fire suppression, BLM will follow the guidance in Appendix A and in Wildland Fire Suppression and Rehabilitation Guidance Common to All Areas Within the Lewistown Field Office Boundaries. The BLM will also follow this guidance to protect archaeological resources from further damage during rehabilitation operations in sensitive areas and all other areas of the polygon.

**Prescribed Fire and Other Fuels Management:** Use prescribed fire to enhance desired plant communities, to manage wildfire, and to reduce hazardous fuel loads. Prescribed fire would generally not be used in some areas due to limited BLM ownership unless coordinated with adjacent landowners to achieve mutually beneficial objectives. Where feasible, prescribed fire may be used to enhance desired plant communities and to provide improved wildlife habitat. Land use will be monitored and adjusted as necessary after fire to sustain stable soils and vegetation. When completing specific fire plans and designs in the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC, Lonesome Lake area and Mount Baldy area, consult appropriate Native American tribes regarding the potential to affect traditional cultural or religious concerns.

**Grazing Management:** Incorporate grazing strategies to reduce hazardous fire fuels near human habitation. Prescription burns may be implemented to meet Health of the land standards and land use plan objectives.

**Vegetation:** Prescribed fire may be used to enhance the growth and vigor of certain species and to maintain specific vegetation communities. To maintain viable sagebrush communities for winter range of deer, antelope, and sage grouse, a mosaic of mature old growth sagebrush will be maintained.

**Wildlife:** Inventory for raptor nests and grouse nesting areas will be conducted on each proposed prescribed burn area one spring prior to the proposed project date. If nests are present, appropriate action including buffer areas will be identified in the burn plan to protect the site. In those areas where sagebrush is treated, the treatment will be done no more frequently than once in 30 years, unless necessary to reduce undesirable species encroachment. The use of prescribed fire in identified sage grouse habitat will be coordinated with private landowners and MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

## **JUDITH (B1), NORTH AND SOUTH MOCCASINS (B4), and LITTLE SNOWY MOUNTAINS (B2)**

**Area Description:** The Little Snowy Mountains consist of blocks of public land surrounded by private and/or Forest Service lands. These areas are mountainous with steep slopes and heavy timber. Commercial timber is abundant with Douglas fir on the north slopes, ponderosa pine on the south slopes, and lodgepole pine at the highest elevations. Riparian vegetation occurs along the numerous small streams and drainage. There are interspersed grassy meadows within the timber types. Much of the private land has summer cabins and home sites. Secondary roads intersect the area. The area offers big game summer and winter ranges and habitat for upland game species. The Judith Mountain Scenic Area ACEC is located the Judith Mountain area. The Collar Gulch ACEC in the Judith Mountains contains aquatic habitat for the West slope cutthroat trout (listed as a sensitive species). The endangered peregrine falcon is present in the Moccasin Mountains. Recreational uses include hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking and caving. The area is a VRM class II area with numerous interspersed historical and current mining claim sites and structures. The area on the north and east slope of the Little Belt Mountains and has relatively small tracts of public land surrounded by or adjacent to private, Forest Service, or state lands. Private cabins and home sites are scattered throughout the area. There are areas of steep slopes with heavy timber, generally consisting of Douglas fir on the north slopes, ponderosa pine on the south slopes, and lodgepole pine at the highest elevations. There are interspersed grassy meadows within the timber types.

The area is also characterized by numerous roads from past mining activities.

**Wildland Fire History:** From 1980 to 1999 Federal agencies have responded to 108 fires on federal lands which burned an estimated 15,200 acres. Average fire size was 141 acres.

**Interface/intermix:** This area contains many small communities and ranches which are built adjacent to public lands containing timber and steep slopes. The potential exists for fire related incidents. In the Judith Mountains, communities include Maiden and Giltedge and scattered homes in Limekiln Canyon and Ruby Gulch. In the Moccasin Mountains, the community of Kendal and surrounding ranches are intermix sites. In the Little Snowy Mountains, the communities of Forest Grove and Grassrange along with scattered ranches located along Flatwillow Creek and Red Hill road are intermix sites.

**Area Concerns and Constraints:** Scattered land pattern, proximity to private land. Special concerns and constraints include scattered land pattern and proximity to private land; ACECs with cultural, paleontological, and vegetative values that might be accessed by fire fighting equipment; and the use of earth moving/tillage equipment in the Wilderness Study Area on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Sensitive areas for cultural resources include the Dry Range west of the Smith River in Meagher County.

**Resource Objectives:** Manage native vegetation to meet standards for rangeland health. Maintain stable soils and sustain current land uses. Sagebrush habitats, especially those in identified sage grouse nesting and wintering areas and big game concentration areas should be maintained to the maximum extent possible. Scattered stands of Ponderosa Pine, especially those exhibiting old growth characteristics, shall be maintained where possible.

**Fire Management Objectives:** Fire, in most cases, can be desirable throughout this zone. However, each occurrence will have special consideration. Obvious concerns focus around structural developments, crop land, livestock and livestock forage needs. Social and political considerations will dictate how each fire occurrence will be managed.

**Wildland Fire Suppression and Rehabilitation:** Minimize the use of heavy equipment and avoid use of bulldozers in or near stream beds.

**Prescribed Fire and Other Fuels Management:** Prescribed fires would generally be used in this area to reduce the build up of natural and activity fuels, reduce the threat of stand replacement fire and reduce fire hazard in interface, rural intermix and residential areas. All

prescribed fire activity would be coordinated with adjacent landowners to achieve mutually beneficial objectives. In some areas prescribed fire would be beneficial to achieve desired plant communities and to enhance wildlife use. Land uses will be monitored and adjusted as necessary after fire to sustain stable soils and vegetation. Mechanical treatment of hazardous fuels would be used in some areas as a first entry. This would include the use of wood products and hand piling and burning to reduce the threat of escaped prescribed fire. The second entry with prescribed fire would be broadcast/under burn. When completing specific fire plans and designs in specific areas sensitive for Native American traditional cultural and religious concerns, consult with appropriate Native American tribes on the potential to affect traditional cultural or religious concerns.

**Forestry:** The areas of primarily forested ground make up the vast majority of the Commercial Timber Base within the Lewistown and Malta Field Offices. The majority of the timber is Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and lodgepole pine as well as scattered pockets of hardwood species. Most areas show signs of decadence and mortality due to overstocking and the absence of fire and/or Forest Management. New stands of Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir are encroaching into areas which historically were natural openings and meadows. Resulting fuel loads far exceed the normal range of variability. Because of limited public access to most of these forested tracts management is limited to opportunities that present itself through adjacent landowner activities. As forest management opportunities present themselves silvicultural practices will be applied which emphasize overall health of the forested stand and reducing fuel loadings in order to prevent loss due to fire, insects and disease.

**Vegetation:** Prescribed burning may be used to enhance the growth and vigor of certain species and to maintain specific vegetation communities that are fire adapted. Maintain and promote stands of mature conifers with mixed grass and shrub under story vegetation. Protect riparian areas that exhibit an over story of deciduous trees from extreme fire events as conditions allow. To maintain viable sagebrush communities for winter range of deer, antelope, and sage grouse, a mosaic of mature old growth sagebrush will be maintained.

**Wildlife:** Prescribed fires should not be authorized within mile of a raptor nest from March 1 to August 1 each year or on crucial winter range between December 1 and March 31. Inventory for bird nests and traditional mammal birthing areas will be conducted on each proposed prescribed burn areas in forested habitat one spring prior to the proposed project date. If permanent nest or birthing

areas are located appropriate action including buffer areas will identified in the burn plan to protect the site.

## MISSOURI BREAKS (C3)

**Area Description:** The Missouri Breaks polygon includes those parts of Petroleum County lying north of Highway 200 and north and east of the Valentine-Dovetail Road to the Missouri and Musselshell Rivers. The polygon contains those lands in north Fergus County adjacent to the Missouri River including the Armells Creek and Judith River drainages. South-eastern Chouteau County along the Missouri River and Arrow Creek drainage, and southern Blaine County along the Missouri River, the Lone Tree Bench area, and the Bullwacker drainage make up the remaining portion of the Lewistown Missouri Breaks polygon. This area is a mix of public and private land. Square Butte (mostly public) and surrounding private land in Eastern and Southern Chouteau County is also included in this polygon. The land form is a series of drainages and ridges running mostly north to south. The area is made up of rolling upland plateaus with moderate to deeply incised canyons. Some of the private uplands are in annual cereal crop production and some are in the Conservation Reserve Program. Native vegetation is primarily sage brush and sage brush grasslands verging into Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir, and juniper communities. Riparian vegetation including native shrubs and Cottonwood trees exists along the Missouri river and drainages throughout this polygon. Water sources within the area include small reservoirs, water-savers, wells, pipelines, and natural streams and rivers. Predominate wildlife species include mule deer, sage grouse, sharptail grouse, elk, and Bighorn sheep. Economic activity consists of small grain production, natural gas development, livestock grazing, and recreations activities including floating, tourism, and hunting. Access in this area depends on the weather as roads become difficult to drive with precipitation. Cow Creek ACEC is located in southern Blaine and Phillips County. This area is important because of its historical values with the Nez Perce and Lewis and Clark Trails and its diverse wildlife populations. Many Wilderness Study areas (WSAs) exist throughout the area including Woodhawk and Dog Creek WSAs in northern Fergus County, and Stafford, Ervin Ridge, and Cow Creek WSAs in southern Blaine County. These areas are significant because of the historical value, vegetative fuels, high recreation use, and diverse wildlife populations along the Missouri River Corridor where these WSAs exist.

**Wildland Fire History:** From 1980 to 1999, Federal agencies responded to 296 fires on federal lands which burned an estimated 24,000 acres. Average fire size was 81 acres.

**Interface/intermix:** Ranches and recreation areas are scattered along the Missouri River. Private ranches adjacent to public lands are located throughout the Breaks polygon. Vegetation consists of grass and sagebrush lands with scattered pockets of timber and crop lands near most ranches. Recreation sites along the Missouri River include the Richard Wood Watchable Wildlife area, Coal Banks Landing, Judith Landing, Stafford Ferry, and James Kipp Park.

**Area Concerns and Constraints:** Concerns include the presence of elk and mule deer; the mix of public and private land with crop production; difficult access; ACECs with cultural, paleontological, and vegetative values that might be accessed by fire fighting equipment; and the use of earth moving/tillage equipment in the Wilderness Study Areas. Sensitive areas for cultural resources include the Cow Creek ACEC, Nez Perce National Historic Trail.

**Resource Objectives:** Manage public lands for sagebrush grassland and Missouri Breaks interface to provide season long forage for wildlife. Limit or minimize erosion. Manage native vegetation to meet standards for rangeland health. Maintain stable soils and sustain current land uses. Sagebrush habitats, especially those in identified sage grouse nesting and wintering areas and big game concentration areas should be maintained to the maximum extent possible. Scattered stands of Ponderosa Pine, especially those exhibiting old growth characteristics, shall be maintained where possible.

**Fire Management Objectives:** Fire could be a positive influence in much of this area and restoration of natural fire regimes will be encouraged where practical. However, each fire occurrence will receive special consideration. A specific fire management plan will be included in the Missouri Breaks National Monument for that portion of this polygon. Obvious concerns focus around structural developments, crop lands, livestock and livestock forage needs. Social and political considerations dictates how each fire occurrence will be managed. Limited fire suppression based on current fire danger, resource availability and predicted weather may be used to ensure safety of fire suppression personnel, reduce cost of fire suppression, and provide an opportunity to return fire to its natural role in the ecology of the area. Only natural fire occurrences (lightning) will be used for limited suppression.

**Wildland Fire Suppression and Rehabilitation:** Because of risk to high value cash crops, wildfire will be suppressed prior to harvest during any hot or dry season. Appropriate management responses to wildland fire in ACEC/WSA areas would include, conditional fire line tactics including the use of natural barriers and hand

constructed fire line. Use of earth moving/tillage equipment would be prohibited for wildland fire suppression in ACEC/WSA areas unless waived by the Field Office Manager or an authorized officer. Staging areas and fire camps would be placed outside these areas wherever possible. The application of fire retardant would be restricted within an ACEC which contains rock art. A Resource advisor will be on site during wildland fire suppression and rehabilitation efforts to insure compliance with the decisions and guidelines for each ACEC/WSA area. Give careful consideration to use of heavy equipment to minimize erosion.

**Prescribed fire and other fuels management:** Prescription burns may be used to protect infrastructure or wildlife habitat that would be permanently lost in the event of a catastrophic wild fire. Prescribed fire may be used to achieve desired plant communities and to reduce hazardous fuel loads. Prescribed fires would generally not be used in areas of limited BLM ownership unless coordinated with adjacent landowners to achieve mutually beneficial objectives. Minimize impacts to sagebrush from prescribed fire wherever possible. Land uses will be monitored and adjusted as necessary after fire to sustain stable soils and vegetation. Some prescribed fire management objectives may be carried out by the limited fire suppression plan developed as part of the Upper Missouri watershed plan or National Monument Plan. When completing specific fire plans and designs in the Cow Creek ACEC, consult with appropriate Native American tribes on the potential to affect traditional cultural or religious concerns.

**Forestry:** Timber in the breaks is found on clay shale uplands of the sedimentary plains. Ponderosa pine is the dominant commercial tree species although lesser amounts of Douglas fir and Spruce do exist. The Breaks are not considered in the traditional timber base. However, harvest opportunities will be considered on a case by case basis when silvicultural objectives can be met that emphasize forest health, stand density reduction and reducing unnatural fuel loadings.

**Vegetation:** Prescribed burning will be used to enhance the growth and vigor of certain species and to maintain specific vegetation communities. Maintain and promote stands of mature conifers with mixed grass and shrub under story vegetation. Protect riparian areas that exhibit an over story of deciduous trees from extreme fire events as conditions allow. To maintain viable sagebrush communities for winter range of deer, antelope, and sage grouse, a mosaic of mature old growth sagebrush will be maintained.

**Wildlife:** Inventory for raptor nests and traditional elk calving areas will be conducted on each proposed

prescribed burn areas one spring prior to the proposed project date. If nests or calving areas are located, appropriate action including buffer areas will be identified in the burn plan to protect the site. In those areas where sagebrush is treated, the treatment will be done no more frequently than once in 30 years, unless necessary to reduce undesirable species encroachment. The use of prescribed fire in identified sage grouse habitat will be coordinated with private landowners and MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT (C6)

**Area Description:** The Rocky Mountain Front Polygon comprises 4 separate tracts of Forested and Non-Forested Parcels which make up the Outstanding Natural Area, (ONA): Blindhorse, Ear Mountain, Chute Mountain, and Deep Creek/Battle Creek. These areas lie North of Gibson Reservoir and West of Choteau, MT. Direction for Forest Management opportunities is clearly specified in the Activity Plan for the Rocky Mountain Front, 7/88. The Front Range contains four Outstanding Natural Areas (ONAs) between Muddy Creek and the North Fork of the Teton River; Blind Horse (4,927 acres), Ear Mountain 1,869 acres, Chute Mountain (3,205 acres) and Deep Creek/Battle Creek (3,086 acres). These areas were designated to be managed for their outstanding scenic and wildland values.

**Outstanding Natural Areas:** Use the most effective wildland fire suppression methods possible while sustaining the least damage to ONA values in compliance with the Rocky Mountain Front Outstanding Natural Area Activity Plan/ Environmental Assessment. Suppression methods may include pumper trucks and hand-line construction. Use of earth moving equipment and fire retardant will be prohibited unless it is needed to prevent fire from spreading to adjacent private lands and is specifically authorized by the Field Manager. Place staging areas and fire camps outside of ONA boundaries unless otherwise authorized by the Field Manager. Ensure a resource advisor is on site during wildland fire suppression and rehabilitation to ensure compliance with decisions and guidelines.

**Interface/intermix:** Arrowleaf at Ear Mountain, Rogers Pass area.

**Area Concerns and Constraints:** Big game species include elk, mule deer, and mountain goats, numerous bird species include raptors. Steep slopes and heavy dog hair timber pose safety hazards for fire fighters. Special concerns and constraints include ACECs with cultural, paleontological, and vegetative values that might be accessed by fire fighting equipment, and the use of earth

moving/tillage equipment in the Outstanding Natural Areas (ONA) and WSA. The Front range polygon is a sensitive area for cultural resources. There are high densities of cultural resources at lower elevations. Traditional cultural properties may be expected at middle and higher elevations.

**Resource Objectives:** Manage native vegetation to meet standards for rangeland health. Maintain stable soils and sustain current land uses. Sagebrush habitats, especially those in identified sage grouse nesting and wintering areas and big game concentration areas should be maintained. Scattered stands of Ponderosa Pine, especially those exhibiting old growth characteristics, shall be also maintained.

**Fire Management Objectives:** Fire, in most cases, can be desirable throughout this zone. However, each occurrence will have special consideration. Obvious concerns focus around structural developments, crop lands, livestock and livestock forage needs. Social and political considerations will determine how each fire occurrence will be managed. Initial attack fire suppression in this polygon is the responsibility of the Lewis and Clark National Forest under the Six Party Fire Protection Agreement.

**Prescribed Fire and Other Fuels Management:** When completing specific fire plans and designs in the Front Range Polygon, consult with appropriate Native American tribes on the potential to affect traditional cultural or religious concerns.

**Outstanding Natural Areas:** When completing specific fire plans and designs in ONAs, target areas where prescribed fire can benefit range condition and wildlife habitat. Target areas may include rough fescue and/or Idaho fescue grassland benches where a majority of fescue plants have become “wolfy” and decadent aspen groves in need of regeneration for wildlife. Highest priority for burning should be given to those benches important as bighorn sheep and elk winter range. Use prescribed fire methods which will not damage ONA values. Place staging areas and fire camps outside the ONA boundaries unless otherwise authorized by the Field Manager. Use of heavy equipment will be avoided and use of power tools and motorized equipment will be limited.

**Timber Management:** Although the emphasis in these areas is not timber production, forest management including harvesting timber should be a considered alternative for meeting land management objectives. Silviculture treatments will emphasize stand density reduction and early successional stages indicative for the given habitat type. Forest treatments for the purpose of fuel reduction, forest health and salvage will be given priority.



*The current plan states “No timber harvest, post and pole cutting, timber improvement practices, firewood cutting, or Christmas tree cutting will be permitted on the ONAs.” Because of current language in the land use plan management of the timbered resources for the purpose of forest health and fuel reduction is not practical, this would be a plan amendment.*

## **BIG SNOWY MOUNTAINS**

The Central Montana Fire Zone provides protection for this area under the Six Party Fire Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement. The Central Zone is responsible for initial attack suppression and fire related rehabilitation on approximately 200,000 acres of the Lewis and Clark National Forest located in the Big Snowy Mountains.

**Special Protection Requirements:** Special protection plan and fire management plan is being developed at this time by the Lewis and Clark National Forest and will be added to this plan when completed.